



**DEFEND THE RIGHT  
TO PROTEST**

**NURSE FINED £10,000  
FOR NHS PAY DEMO**

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**BLOOD MONEY**  
**HOW SLAVERY PROFITS  
BUILT CAPITALISM**

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# Socialist Worker

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## AFTER TORIES' NHS PAY INSULT



HEALTH WORKERS protested against the Tories' 1 percent pay offer outside Downing Street in London last Sunday

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

# 'WE'VE GOT TO STRIKE'

## Furious health workers speak out

"STRIKES ARE the only way we'll win decent pay and protect the NHS." That's the message from Jordan Rivera, an occupational therapist and Unison union activist in east London.

And many other workers in the health service say similar.

"I've got people's lives in my hands every day at work, yet the government thinks I'm only

worth a 1 percent pay rise. It's disgusting," says Leah Sparks, a nurse for 13 years.

"I work in the community caring for patients with heart failure.

"It's a really important job that I've had to train hard for. Yet, as a single parent with two children, my salary won't pay the bills and the mortgage so I have to claim Universal Credit.

"That's extremely demoralising. "The last year has been tough. We were understaffed before the Covid-19 crisis hit, but during it things have been much worse.

"That's meant there were too few staff to see all the patients in a timely manner.



**'We have fire in our bellies. We've got to harness that feeling'**  
**Leah Sparks** Nurse, Essex

"And that affects the quality of care. I've been really stressed by the job I love because I'm not able to do it to the standard I want.

"I hear a lot of talk about nurses wanting to leave the NHS, and I think the 1 percent pay offer will drive some out.

"But I think we have to act collectively. I'm a rep in the RCN and I think our members want the union to lead by example. So it's really good that we are talking about industrial action.

"There is fire in people's bellies right now and we've got to harness that feeling."

**>>Pages 4&5**

### EDUCATION

## 'Big bang' return will fuel Covid-19 spread and deaths

THE FULL return to schools and colleges in England will contribute to tens of thousands of deaths, according to scientists.

Modelling shows that lifting restrictions could see up to 100,000 deaths even with the vaccine rollout.

But some workers are resisting an unsafe return.

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### STRIKE



## British Gas workers reject deal and fight on

BRITISH GAS strikers have voted overwhelmingly to continue strikes against bosses' fire and rehire plans.

They rejected a deal that would keep fire and rehire and returned to picket lines.

Striker Mike told Socialist Worker, "We stood together to show British Gas we won't be bullied."

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### ENVIRONMENT

## Fukushima—ten years on gives a nuclear warning

AN EARTHQUAKE and tsunami hit the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan ten years ago this week.

It caused a deadly meltdown of nuclear reactors.

The disaster also exposed the cosy relationship between the state and nuclear bosses.

**>>Pages 14&15**





# Don't let Tory intimidation take away right to protest

by ISABEL RINGROSE

**THE RIGHT to protest is under severe attack as the Tories ramp up the fining of protesters and look set to keep restrictions in place for months.**

The Tories have been plotting to restrict the right to protest since a ban was brought in for Tier 4 areas under their failed tier system.

And they extended it across England when new Covid-19 legislation was brought in for the latest lockdown.

Last Sunday Manchester police fined mental health nurse Karen Reissmann £10,000.

Karen had been part of organising a small, socially distanced protest against the pitiful 1 percent pay rise for NHS workers.

Cops said the gathering in the city centre was illegal under coronavirus restrictions.

Yet all the demonstrators were wearing masks, made sure to stand at a distance from each other and dispersed when ordered to by police.

## Warning

Following a police warning of possible arrests Karen agreed to end the protest.

But the cops issued the fine anyway, saying they had been met with "a degree of non-compliance".

The crackdown has seen arrests, fines and threats against protesters and strikes around the country.

Not all protests are being shut down and the arbitrary punishments are causing further anger.

This attack on a health worker shows that the state is stepping up attacks on resistance as a whole.

Fundraising for Karen's fine has already exceeded its target but organisers should not have to pay or be subject to intimidation.



**FINED £10,000—Nurse and union activist Karen Reissmann speaking in Manchester at last weekend's NHS pay protest**

PICTURE: MIKE KILLIAN

The Tories and the right previously have hidden behind statements that they wanted people to stay at home to protect the NHS.

But when those NHS workers hold protests they are the ones being targeted.

The Tories have done much more to risk our lives than safe, socially distanced protests have.

They sent ten million children and workers back into English schools this week.

The government's roadmap to reopening states that outdoor social contact rules will be lifted on 17 May, but gatherings of over 30 will remain illegal, until no earlier than 21 June.

This means a ban on protests is expected until the summer.

## Outdoor

Yet the guidance also says that as of May 1,000 people will be allowed to gather in indoor venues and 4,000 in outdoor ones.

And in the largest outdoor venues up to 10,000 people will be able to gather. So the government is not looking to keep virus transmission down but to restrict the right to resist its policies.

The right to protest also came under attack last summer when the Black Lives Matter demonstrations spread. But the sheer number of anti-racists that took to the streets meant the state could do little.

The most extensive protests possible must continue for the international day of action against racism on 20 March.

Physical protests, observing all the necessary safety measures, must be as big as possible to fight racism and the Tories' restrictions.

## On other pages...

British Gas strikers vote to reject offer and fight on >>>Page 6

## BENEFITS

**FOOD BANKS are last resort**

## Claimants go without food

SAMANTHA receives Employment Support Allowance (ESA) as she can't work for health reasons. Universal Credit (UC) has seen a temporary increase during the pandemic. But there has been no uplift to ESA or any other "legacy" benefits that predate UC.

Samantha told Socialist Worker that not getting the uplift "makes you feel like you're not a human".

"I'm a single mum with a 13 year old lad who has been at home throughout the pandemic," she said. "He's a big lad and just wants to eat all the time. I've also been shielding."

Samantha said she has had days where she has "gone without" food altogether so that her son can eat.

## Energy

She's also been forced to use more energy. "Normally, the heating goes on first thing in the morning and when he comes home from school," she said.

"But while he's been here, it's been on more. I'm dreading my next gas and electric bills."

Samantha has been forced to use food banks, which has affected her health.

"Food banks do a brilliant job," she said. "But a lot of it was tinned food. I've not been eating fresh fruit and veg, and now I'm severely anaemic."

The Tories' lack of support for benefit claimants leaves many having to choose between heating and eating.

Rishi Sunak's budget (see page 17) won't solve any of this. "They need to keep that £20 for Universal Credit people permanently, and not take it off them in another six months," said Samantha.

"But they also need to address how the legacy benefit people are being treated."

## Socialist Worker

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## Cops set for more power

TORY HOME secretary Priti Patel wants to give the police more powers to control protests—even after Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted.

Patel wrote to the head of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.

She said she wanted information about how the Home Office could ensure that the police had powers to make sure that protests do not have an impact on "the rights of others to go about their daily business".

"I would like to know what steps the government could take

to ensure the police have the right powers and capabilities to respond to protests," it said.

The letter, written last September, also includes Patel describing the Black Lives Matter protests as "dreadful" and "illegal". This shows she is looking to prevent future mass street movements.

Patel's letter has led to a review by the inspectorate of how the police can effectively manage protests. This could bring about new laws to force further restrictions on protests, strikes and resistance.

Priti Patel





# Workers say they could strike over pay insult in the NHS

by YURI PRASAD

**A STORM of anger hit the Tories after they called for a paltry 1 percent pay rise for NHS workers—and it could lead to strikes.**

The government deliberately timed its message to go out last Thursday, a day after the chancellor's budget speech, in the hope it wouldn't be noticed. And, when asked, ministers told health workers they "should be grateful" they got anything at all.

NHS staff are furious.

"What a kick in the teeth for everyone who has worked so hard through the pandemic," a London paramedic and GMB union member told Socialist Worker.

"The Tories have just confirmed what we already knew—that they really don't care at all about the NHS or the people who work day and night to keep it going.

"So many of my colleagues have had Covid and some have been very unwell for a long time. Many still haven't recovered. And we've seen colleagues die.

"We all fear taking the virus home to our own families. We mostly work 12-hour shifts and often they go on longer than that. We struggle to get any decent rest or to eat and drink properly.

"And 1 percent is all they think we are worth? Well, they'll see how much we are actually worth if we all go on strike."

## Rally

That mood was reflected in an online rally of the nurses' RCN union.

Leaders of the union announced that they had already allocated £35 million to a strike fund. They said they were "fully prepared" to take action to win their demand of a 12.5 percent pay rise.

Chair of the RCN Dave Dawes said the Tories' 1 percent pay offer was a "political choice". He pointed to the budget which had handed the bosses £25 billion in a "super deduction fund" to show that more money was available.

Dawes repeatedly pointed out

## BACK STORY

**NHS workers have faced years of below inflation pay rises—effectively pay cuts**

● A three-year pay deal agreed in 2018 comes to an end this April

● Under the deal, most workers got below-inflation increases

● Now the Tories have offered yet another increase of just 1 percent—another real terms cut

● But anger over pay has already been growing

● Many NHS workers protested over pay last summer

that RCN nurses struck in Northern Ireland last year and that the whole union was ready to do so again.

Unison, the biggest health service union, has also told its members that a pay strike is a possibility. It is asking its activists to get membership records up to date in case of a ballot in the summer.

## Imaginative

It announced plans for a "mass slow handclap" on people's doorsteps and balconies on Thursday of this week at 8pm. Many activists urged supporters to stretch the initiative in imaginative ways.

Already some are planning small clapping protests outside hospitals, and others are organising workplace action.

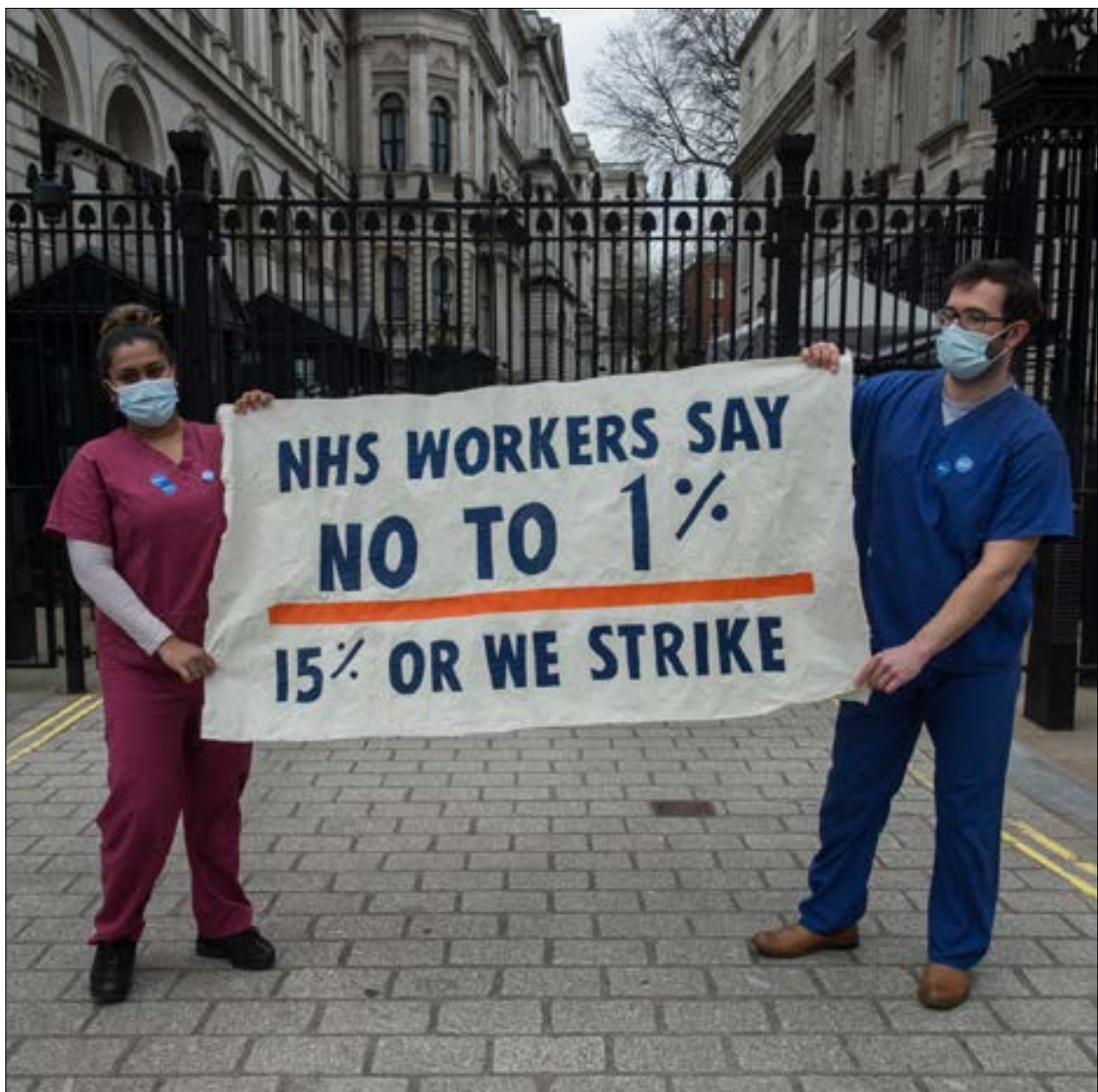
Postal workers in north London told Socialist Worker they are planning to pause work to take mass selfies with posters in support of NHS workers.

The scale of anger at the government reflects just how weak it is.

Strikes across the NHS would be incredibly popular and could galvanise the millions of other public sector workers whose pay has been frozen.

A united fight would rock the Tories to their core.

**On other pages...**  
Budget gives away tax cuts to rich and big business>>Page 17



NHS WORKERS protested outside Downing Street on Sunday (above and below)

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

# 'We need to make the possibility of a strike real in every workplace'

SO FAR, all I hear from colleagues and friends everywhere is, "We've had enough and we've got to strike."

The important question for all health worker activists now is, how do we sustain this mood over the at least few months before any strike ballot will start?

We know that the NHS Pay Review body will be collecting evidence until the end of April. It will then make a recommendation, which the government will either accept or change.

So we'll be well into spring before unions can move into a formal dispute with the employers.

We need to make the possibility of a strike feel real in every NHS workplace. That means we need to talk to all our colleagues and spread the idea.

We should launch union recruitment campaigns, telling the people we work with that action is coming.

And existing members need to be reminded that we need



to check their details so that a ballot will be legal. Even these basic steps will start to create an atmosphere for a fight back.

A lot of the media focus on NHS pay has been on nurses. But we need to make sure that every worker is involved in this fight.

Often the lowest paid are forgotten about—we can't afford for that to happen this time around. I think we should

consider hospital-wide pay campaigns that involve people from all unions and every type of NHS job.

We can use these to distribute leaflets and newsletters, and take up specific arguments. Stickers and badges should be everywhere.

We need a really good social media presence in every Trust. Photos and videos of people holding placards and saying they are ready to strike are really good.

Every serious activist knows that a strike is the only way we are going to get the pay rise we deserve.

But to get there we are going to have to keep up massive pressure on our own unions, who may well be happy to settle for a slightly improved offer from the Tories.

This is going to be a long fight and we will have to be creative if we're going to win it. **Jordan Rivera, member of the Unison union health executive (in a personal capacity)**

# 'We can strike safely—for both staff and patients'

MOST OF my colleagues really back the idea of going on strike. But there are some who fear the impact on patients, and worry about whether it can be done safely.

Many younger staff have never been on strike, or seen how hospitals can function during a dispute.

The most important thing to say is that our fight is for ourselves, but is also for our patients. At the moment many hospital wards have so few staff that they are already unsafe.

We are short of tens of thousands of nurses and other vital staff, and a key reason for that is low pay.

If we beat the government and improve our wages, the NHS will attract more workers and improve care.

It is possible to strike, even under the present dangerous conditions, while maintaining good cover for patients.

In a normal strike, the aim of the union is to stop production



NHS workers have struck before

but that's not what happens in a hospital.

First, the union will agree with Trust bosses an appropriate minimum level of staff cover for each ward.

That's designed to ensure there are enough people to deal with routine work.

During the pandemic we have seen that management can, when it suits them, find clinical staff from research and other areas to help run wards.

They will have to do so again during any industrial action.

Second, being on strike does not mean

vital staff are not available for work in case of emergency.

We will be on picket lines outside our hospitals and are easily contactable if serious issues arise.

But we, as a union, will collectively decide how to respond.

The only way for us to truly protect our patients and the health service we all cherish is to fight for it—and that means going on strike.

**Janet Maiden, nurse and University College London Hospitals Unison branch chair (personal capacity)**

# Other workers must fight too

MORE THAN 2.6 million public sector workers have been told their pay will be "frozen" for at least the next year.

That will mean an effective pay cut with many bills and council tax set to rise sharply.

Many of those affected will have played a vital role as "key workers" during the pandemic.

They are still being pressured to work ever harder to cover for colleagues who are sick or self-isolating.

Britain's biggest



Courtney—won't rule strikes in or out

teachers' union has warned it was not ruling out strikes in response.

Kevin Courtney, general secretary of the NEU, said "members' focus right now" is on the

reopening of schools. But when asked if he would rule out strike action on pay, he told Times Radio, "I wouldn't rule it out, I'm not ruling it in."

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has tried to divide public and private sector workers by saying those employed by the state are "privileged".

But public sector pay cuts drive help drive down the pay of all workers.

Unions should come together to launch a united fight against the pay freeze.

# Dorries' lies hide hypocrisy

TORY minister Nadine Dorries and right wing commentators have been quick to say that an average nurse earns "around £34,000 a year".

But the overwhelming majority of nurses are in "band

5". Pay starts at just £24,907 and rises to a maximum of £30,615 after seven or more years in the job.

Many thousands of vital NHS workers earn even less, with some nursing assistants paid just

£1,348 a month.

No such worries for Dorries.

In 2013, it was reported that she used up to £44,999 a year of public money to employ her daughter to do "constituency work" for her.

**Socialist Worker**  
WHAT WE THINK

# HOW HAVE THE TORIES SURVIVED ALL THIS?

**B**ORIS JOHNSON keeps getting away with it. He's been through scandal after scandal, and crisis after crisis, and still sits securely in Downing Street.

The biggest charge that should be laid at Johnson's feet is the catastrophic toll that coronavirus has taken on ordinary people.

A string of major scandals—the privatised test and trace system, the NHS staffing crisis, ending lockdown too early, to name a few—together make a monumental one.

Britain has consistently had one of the highest coronavirus death rates in the world because Johnson's government keeps putting the interests of business over people's lives.

And yet the Tories are sitting comfortably in the polls.

Supporters of Labour leader Keir Starmer hope that all Starmer has to do is wait for that to pass, then pick up on anger at Tory failures by presenting himself as a more "competent" leader.

Opinion polls indeed mask anger, and not just at the way the pandemic has been handled.

This anger keeps bursting out. Whether it's support for NHS workers demanding a pay rise,

fury over the refusal to keep providing free school meals, or at the cronyism embodied by Matt Hancock and Dominic Cummings.

It builds on deeper anger at the way society has been run—at falling living standards, rising inequality and structural racism.

Johnson picked up on that by making sure he was seen to deliver Brexit, which many people voted for in a kick back at the elite.

Starmer wishes he could do the same simply by wrapping himself in a Union Jack. He's recently started to talk about how the Tories want to "paper over the cracks"—over the bigger problems caused by years of Tory rule.

But when push comes to shove, he always keeps his distance from any real expression of people's

**The labour movement should have launched a broader assault**

the blood-soaked empire. We learned this week that some top royal was concerned about how black Meghan's baby would be, a disgusting racist comment.

Add that to prince Philip's endless racist remarks.

Boris Johnson refused to comment on the latest crisis. It is no surprise that he would shy away from speaking up against racism.

Johnson said, "I've always had the highest admiration for the queen and the unifying role that she plays."

anger. Starmer talked down the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement as a "moment" when its demands became too militant.

In reality, the mass BLM protests in 2020 were the biggest challenge those at the top have faced from ordinary people in years.

BLM hasn't gone away. But the intensity and persistence of mass demonstrations can't be kept up indefinitely.

The labour movement should have been inspired to launch an even broader assault on the Tories, with protests and strikes.

But union leaders, similar to Keir Starmer, hold off. They're sometimes comfortable with localised strikes.

But they don't talk about trying to tie these battles together, building them into a bigger, more decisive confrontation with the Tories and the bosses.

Now there's a chance to build a fight over pay in the NHS. But if we want to make sure Johnson doesn't survive, we have to make it into a fight for every working class person against the Tories.

We also need to intensify the fight against the Tories' murderous handling of coronavirus and the wider attacks on working class people.

# THE ROYAL REIGN MUST END

**T**HE LATEST royal scandal is being heralded as the biggest crisis the parasitical family has faced. Yet only last year evidence resurfaced linking senior Prince Andrew to paedophile Jeffrey Epstein. The demonisation of Meghan and Harry by part of the media seeks to provide cover for the royals' other crimes.

Racism is at the heart of the monarchy. It could hardly be otherwise from an institution that in modern times headed

the blood-soaked empire. We learned this week that some top royal was concerned about how black Meghan's baby would be, a disgusting racist comment.

Add that to prince Philip's endless racist remarks.

Boris Johnson refused to comment on the latest crisis. It is no surprise that he would shy away from speaking up against racism.

Johnson said, "I've always had the highest admiration for the queen and the unifying role that she plays."

That role means breaking down class interests by trying to pump workers full of patriotism.

Questions are then not asked about who funds the opulent lifestyle of an unelected head of state and her brood.

The monarchy upholds the system, state and those who rule it—the capitalists. And it tries to legitimise Britain's legacy across the world. Abolishing the monarchy, and tearing up the system as a united working class, is the only option.

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## ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



## Debt is rising but the rich won't be paying

**EVERYONE IS** talking about debt. This is mainly because of the enormous amounts governments are borrowing to cover extra spending in responding to the pandemic. The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak will spend £344 billion on the pandemic in 2020-21, 16 percent of national income.

Government borrowing in the same period is projected at £355 billion. As a result, British public debt is forecast to reach 97 percent of gross domestic product by the mid-2020s, way above a pre-pandemic figure of 73 percent.

In Britain and the United States most of the new debt takes the form of government bonds bought by the central banks. In effect they are creating the money the government is spending.

But according to a central pillar of free market orthodoxy, creating new money will increase the rate of inflation. Ultra-neoliberals have been predicting an inflationary surge ever since central banks began the policy of “quantitative easing” in response to the 2007-8 crash. The policy saw bonds held by banks bought as a way of putting extra money into the financial system. But the surge never happened.

The same predictions are now being made by more mainstream figures. Both ex-US treasury secretary Lawrence Summers and Martin Wolf of the Financial Times have warned that Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion (£1.37 trillion) fiscal stimulus may be inflationary.

More importantly, the huge global markets in government bonds have started behaving as if they agree with them. Prices have fallen very sharply for leading government bonds this year. Bonds entitle their holders to a fixed income. So, if the price falls the “yield”, or rate of return on the bond, rises. The yield on the US Treasury ten-year bond has jumped from under 1 percent to 1.6 percent.

Bond yields exert an enormous influence on interest rates, so the rise puts pressure on central banks to raise their interest rates to curb inflation.

The economist Ed Yardeni says, “We’re in a brave new world of excesses in fiscal and monetary policy, and that’s where the bond vigilantes thrive. It’s their job to bring law and order back to the economy when the central banks and the fiscal authorities are lawless.”

But there’s not much evidence that inflation is taking off. The prices of some commodities—notably oil and copper—have risen. This reflects speculation that the rollout of vaccines will lead to a rapid end to the pandemic and a huge economic boom to make up for the output lost in the past year.

### Wishful

This is probably wishful thinking. Rapid vaccine distribution is confined to a handful of countries. Even in the imperialist core of the world economy, the European Union is bungling the rollout and vaccination is very uneven in the US. And the picture is much grimmer in the global South. It will take comprehensive worldwide vaccinations to overcome Covid-19.

Meanwhile states seem less afraid of the bond markets than they were in the 1990s. Central banks have got used to managing them. Robert Michele of JPMorgan points out that the US Federal Reserve Board is buying \$120 billion (£86 billion) of bonds a month.

“At some point yields will have gotten too high, and the relentless weight of the bond purchases from the central banks will stabilise the market. The asset purchases are relentless. You can’t fight that,” he says.

How serious the accumulating debt is in the longer term really depends on the state of the productive economy that has to carry it.

Here the picture is gloomy because the major economies were still struggling with the effects of the global financial crisis before the pandemic hit.

But Sunak gave the wrong answer when he played to the Thatcherite instincts of Tory backbenchers by increasing taxation. Not just on corporations, but on ordinary wage earners by freezing their tax allowances.

The insulting 1 percent pay increase to NHS workers was a signal that when the economic recovery does come, Sunak will greet it with yet more austerity. Debt is one thing, who pays for it is quite another.



WORKERS ARE fighting against fire and hire contracts

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

# British Gas strikers fight on after rejecting firm’s offer

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

**BRITISH GAS strikers have voted overwhelmingly to continue their strikes. They have shown that despite bullying bosses, threats of job losses and union leaders’ silence they will keep coming back to the picket lines.**

Workers were on strike on Friday, Saturday and Sunday of last week and Monday of this week. The GMB union has said that strikes could continue until mid-April.

GMB members voted by 79 percent—on an 88 percent turnout—to reject the offer of a new contract.

They are demanding that parent company Centrica drops plans to fire and rehire them on worse terms and conditions on 31 March.

### Jubilant

British Gas striker Mike told Socialist Worker he was “jubilant” after hearing the results of the vote. “We stood together to show British Gas we won’t be bullied into a deal that wasn’t even near acceptable,” he said.

“I’m happy we stuck together and really showed the senior leaders of the company how we feel.

“Hopefully it sends a

strong message to them that the solidarity we have shown is confidence building and morale boosting.”

Farridin, another British Gas striker, wrote on Twitter, “You can’t bully people into doing more.”

The vote came after British Gas and the GMB entered negotiations at government conciliation service Acas.

But their deal still increased unsociable working

hours and meant workers would work more hours for less pay.

The company did offer strikers a bribe of up to £4,000 to sign the contract.

The GMB knew that the offer was inadequate.

It said in a press release, “British Gas’ fire and rehire plan is the main obstacle to members’ accepting a deal—they need to remove it now if we are to progress.”

But in the run-up to the vote the union did not push for workers to continue with the strikes, and mostly remained silent.

To make up for this, sections of workers organised and agitated—largely online—to vote no to the deal.

### Leadership

It is clear that workers are the force driving this strike.

From the beginning strikers have said they want to make it as difficult as possible for other bosses to use the shameful practice of fire and rehire.

The overwhelming vote against ending the strikes shows that workers want to push ahead—not only for their own jobs but for many other workers.

Already 30 days of strikes have forced the company to make concessions.

Escalating them can force more from the bosses.

An all-out strike would have the power to take fire and rehire completely off the table and repel attacks on workers’ conditions.

It would stop British Gas recovering between rounds of action.

Workers must continue to push for further strikes and militancy from the bottom up.

## Action hits the bosses

**THE STRIKES** continue to threaten British Gas’ profits as well as its respectability.

Justin Bowden, GMB national secretary, said, “More than 250,000 homes are in a backlog for repairs and 350,000 planned annual service visits have been axed.

“The company is misleading the media that it is catching up after 24 hours.”

After the result of the vote on the deal came in, Centrica chief executive Chris O’Shea hit out at the union.

“While we’ve reached collective agreements with the majority of our

trade unions, we have been unable to secure an agreement with the GMB,” he said.

He complained that was “despite two extensive rounds of talks and making significant concessions”.

O’Shea also admitted that Centrica could be about to take on 1,000 new workers.

He said this is “as a result of making changes to our contracts”.

Yet the company disgracefully continues to threaten that at the end of this month it will sack 7,000 workers who are striking to defend their livelihoods.

# Schools reopening will spread Covid-19

**Sadie Robinson** looks at the dangers of students and workers returning to schools and colleges in England

A FULL return to schools and colleges in England this week will contribute to the deaths of tens of thousands more people by spreading Covid-19.

That was the stark message from an online meeting on Saturday hosted by the Zero Covid Coalition group.

The Tories claim to be “following the science” with their plans to ease restrictions. But scientists say otherwise.

Dr Deepti Gurdasani, a clinical epidemiologist at Queen Mary University, pointed to models of how the virus will develop.

“In different scenarios of easing we see at least 30,000 deaths,” she told Saturday’s meeting. “We can see up to 100,000 deaths.

“These models account for vaccine rollout. So that is not preventing tens of thousands of deaths.

“It is implied in the plan that these deaths are acceptable.”

She said school age cases are closely linked to the opening and closing of schools.

“When we started opening school in September, within four weeks we saw a quadrupling of cases,” Gurdasani added.

## Positive

Professor John Edmunds from the government’s Sage group of scientists said cases remain high. “The latest ONS survey suggests there are almost a quarter of a million individuals who would test positive in England alone,” he said.

“That’s roughly one in 20. It’s still a very high prevalence, roughly the same as mid-October. That was two weeks away from a lockdown.”

Professor Christina Pagel also from the independent Sage group pointed out that the virus doesn’t affect everyone equally.

She explained, “People who don’t have the option of working from home who live in crowded areas can’t have a lockdown.”

Pagel added that Covid-19 is

## BACK STORY

**A schools and colleges in England reopened this week following government instruction**

● The Tories claim they are following the science, but the science says otherwise

● Reopening schools without sufficient safety measures will cause another spike in cases and deaths, despite the vaccine

● Workers must refuse to risk their lives, and the lives of others, in unsafe conditions

becoming a disease of the poor “and I worry that this government is ok with that.”

It’s not a good look for the Tories to say that the poorest will die as a result of their policies, even though they have admitted this. Instead, they focus on pretending to care about education.

Yet as Edmunds said, “There is a risk that children will suffer significant disruption to their education in the summer term.”

As more restrictions are lifted, Edmunds predicted a significant rise in cases “from mid-May onwards”.

And this doesn’t take account of new variants, the emergence of which is a “significant danger over the next few months”.

On Friday, the Isle of Man closed all of its schools following a rise in cases.

The Isle of Man had come out of lockdown on 1 February and reopened schools, after 17 days of no unexplained community Covid-19 cases. Last week it had 58 cases.

It’s already clear that a full return to schools and colleges without enough measures in place to protect safety is going to kill more ordinary people.

Workers should refuse to go along with it.

**BACK TO school will mean back to more cases and deaths**

## Workers say latest plans are a ‘one way road to an early death’

**EDUCATION UNIONS have rightly said the Tories’ ‘big bang’ reopening of schools in England is reckless.**

In January NEU union leaders called on primary school staff to refuse to return to schools by citing Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

This says workers have a right to refuse to attend unsafe workplaces.

The successful call helped push the Tories to include schools in the latest lockdown.

The NEU has not issued such a clear call this time. It says there is “potential” for workers to use Section 44 “under advice from the union” but is not generally encouraging this.

UCU union leader Jo Grady has spoken out against a full return to face to face teaching in colleges and universities.

Delegates to the union’s annual congress this year called on the union to instruct workers to use Section 44 to protect safety. But Grady has so far not done so. Workers organising on the ground will be the key

to protecting safety in schools, colleges and universities.

Some have already shown it is possible to win better safety measures and a phased return.

UCU rep and vice chair of the further education sector Sean Vernell said safety fears drove workers at one north London college to take action.

“The union made clear we are prepared to support members who wish to use Section 44 if they need to,” he told a union meeting last week. “We’re in a difficult situation.

## Road

“Boris Johnson says that we are on a ‘one way road to freedom’. But for many, it is more like a ‘one way road to an early death’.

“Johnson is prepared to risk our members’ lives for the profits of big business. We are prepared to go into dispute to protect our members’ lives.”

Sean told Socialist Worker that “campaigning has made a difference” in how cautiously bosses stagger a return. “Half the college won’t be going back

to face to face teaching until after Easter,” he said.

“The return for 16-19 year olds is spread over two weeks. The vast majority of students will have blended learning, which ranges from 30 to 60 percent online.

“Before Christmas, we were heading for a dispute over health and safety.

“Some 400 union members signed a petition in support of our demands.

“Two weeks ago, Ofsted was doing a monitoring visit. Again, 400 staff in half a day signed a petition demanding a halt to all inspections until after the pandemic.

“It was delivered to the inspectors as they ‘virtually’ entered the building.

“This demonstrated to our employers that we can and will take action if necessary to ensure a safe return to onsite teaching.”

We need more resistance to make workplaces safe—and to refuse to attend if they are dangerous.





## IN BRIEF

## Hundreds join Tunisia protests

HUNDREDS OF people marched in Tunisia, North Africa, on Saturday demanding the release of a prominent LGBT+ activist and all others arrested for protesting against the government.

The protest was in response to the arrest of Rania Amdouni, who was singled out by cops and jailed for her part in the demonstrations.

Rania is one of more than 1,000 people to have been arrested since protests began in January.

Protesters are angry at high unemployment and the movement has piled pressure on the government.

The main government party, Ennahda, mobilised tens of thousands of people in its defence last month. Yet protests against it are persistent.

The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights recorded 6,500 protests in 2020, all of which were motivated by economic, social and environmental demands.

## Myanmar hit by general strike

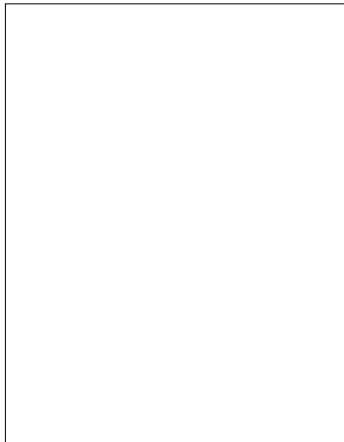
A GENERAL strike in Myanmar on Monday of this week shut down most of the commercial centre of Yangon, including hospitals, ministry offices and banks.

Tens of thousands took the streets in protest at February's military coup. The army regime responded with brutality.

It used tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades. It also brought in bulldozers to smash the barricades built to keep the police out.

Militarised police toured neighbourhoods ahead of the strike to try and round up activists. They occupied two hospitals because doctors and nurses have played a prominent role in the movement.

The general strike will increase the pressure on the regime, but to stop the carnage it should be extended indefinitely.



Protesters during the general strike

# George Floyd—protests as murder trial begins

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

**THE AUTHORITIES in the US are gearing up for protests after George Floyd's murderer went to trial this week.**

Floyd was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin on the streets of Minneapolis in Minnesota last May. His death sparked a global movement against systemic racism.

Jury selection in the trial began on Monday. Chauvin faces charges of second-degree murder and manslaughter. The second-degree murder charge means that Chauvin is deemed to have killed Floyd without intent.

Floyd's family have publicly said that they pushed for Chauvin to be charged with first-degree murder—killing that is wilful or premeditated.

Three other police officers—J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas K Lane and Tou Thao—will also face trial later this year for aiding and abetting in the murder and manslaughter of Floyd.

Protesters took to the streets ahead of the Chauvin trial, and plan more marches across the US as it unfolds.

Over 150 people demonstrated in front of the Minnesota governor's mansion last Saturday.

### Hurting

Minneapolis resident Kasim Abdur Razzaq said, "The community is hurting. As a black man I have to think about how police have responded to people being upset and vocalising that.

"No matter the verdict, there will be a heavier police presence in black communities."

The authorities have tried to limit protests under Operation Safety Net with more cops on the

streets. Two thousand National Guard troops are also expected on the streets after opening statements by lawyers are heard.

And at least one million dollars is reportedly being spent to install fences and other barricades around the courthouse and police precincts during the trial.

Pressure from below and the immense scale of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement pushed the House of Representatives to pass the George Floyd Bill.

This aims to ban the police from using chokeholds among other measures.

California Democrat representative Karen Bass, who wrote the bill, said, "Never again should an unarmed individual be murdered or brutalised by someone who is supposed to serve and protect them."

This new legislation reflects the strength of the movement.

But the bill won't stop cops from killing black people. Floyd died after Chauvin knelt on his neck for over eight minutes.

And Republicans are likely to block the bill in the Senate.

US president Joe Biden knows that reforms are needed to try and contain some of the anger.

But these are minuscule steps to try and reform a police force that can't be reformed.

The struggle against the racism that led to George Floyd's death must continue outside courtrooms and Congress.

### FRANCE

## Don't back up state hate

THOUSANDS OF people joined marches in the run-up to International Women's Day across France last weekend.

Angry demonstrations, mostly of women, took place in Paris, Lyon, Montpellier, Lille, Nice, Quimper and other cities.

The marches denounced the government's lack of action over violence against women, and called for women's equality.

In Paris a group of feminist activists held up posters denouncing sex work.

They were attacked by other marchers.

Sex work is not a route to liberation, and the movement

should focus on the main enemy—the state and the bosses.

But the particular group calling for an end to prostitution is notorious for assaults on trans rights and condemnation of Islam.

One of their leading figures is Marguerite Stern. She says, "The veil is not a garment but a tool for the domination of men over women." And she adds, "I have the right to say that I hate Communism, that I hate Nazism, that I hate Islam."

Such views chime with the government's assault on Muslims, as well as targeting trans people.

### SWITZERLAND

## Face covering ban is racist

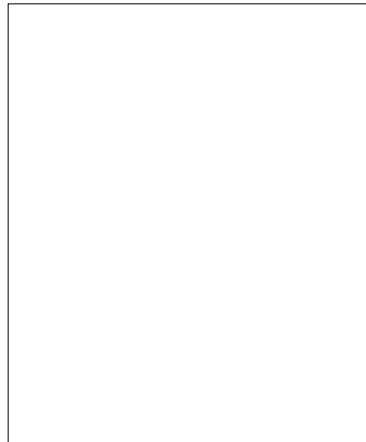
SWITZERLAND WILL ban women from wearing a burqa or niqab, following a referendum. The proposal passed by 51.2 percent and prohibits full face coverings in streets, shops and restaurants.

But face coverings are permitted in places of prayer and also for health and safety reasons—such as face masks during the pandemic.

Some supporters say the referendum didn't refer to Islam.

But it was proposed by the right wing Swiss People's Party. Its campaign ads showed women in a niqab with the slogan, "Stop extremism! Yes to the veil ban."

Attacks on Muslims must be resisted.



A racist poster in Switzerland

## A celebration of resistance

INTERNATIONAL Working Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated across the world on 8 March and this year is no different.

As the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic lays bare vast inequalities, we see worker's struggle deepen internationally. It's more important than ever to remember the radical roots of the day.

It is particularly important to remember the role that garment workers played in the initial spark of IWD. On 8 March 1908, 15,000 women garment workers marched through New York demanding better pay and better living conditions. In 1909, 20,000 garment workers in New York declared a general strike, after many workers were dismissed for trying to join a union.

Over 100 years later, the struggles are far from over.

As coronavirus spread across the world last year, majority-women garment workers in the Global South, began to suffer the consequences of corporations shutting down factories.

In Bangladesh alone, one million workers lost their jobs due to Covid-19. The workers targeted were disproportionately union members.

This is just one example of the ways in which capitalism continues to dispossess and exploit workers for profit.

IWD is an opportunity to challenge this system across borders. Women and workers united in our shared histories and continuing solidarity.

Heidi Henders  
East London



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

## Catalan political prisoners and the fight for independence

RECENTLY (Socialist Worker, 3 March) Laura Verdasco wrote about the eruption of protests and subsequent imprisonment of the Catalan anti-fascist rapper Pablo Hasel.

They referred to "the gag law" pushed by the authoritarian, Spanish constitutional court.

It is yet another severe example of the systematic suppression and repression of the Catalan independence movement. It is evidence of the continuing legacy of Francisco Franco.

At the moment democratically elected Catalan politicians are still in prison together with other leaders.

Or they are in exile after being sentenced by the same court.

The recent new elections in

Catalonia have once again shown a solid and marginal increase for independence.

In 2017, following the independence referendum, Carles Puigdemont, the Catalan president, was forced to go into exile after declaring independence.

It looks, however, as if the wonderful European Union parliament is debating whether to agree to the extradition request by Spain of Puigdemont, now an MEP. Belgium and Germany have so far resisted this. But for how much longer will the forces for democracy through peaceful protest and freedom of speech even exist?

Pau Casals, the famous cellist and a proud Catalan fled into exile because of the arrival of Franco

and never returned. He made the famous United Nations speech in 1971, "I am a Catalan".

He proclaimed once again the importance of the values of peace and freedom.

The West let the Catalans and Republicans down during and after the Second World War.

They never fought Franco, allowing the bloody dictator to colonise, suppress freedom and brutally repress the Basques and the Catalans.

The EU stance is merely repeating history once more.

It is clear that the lessons from the past have certainly not been learnt.

Sue Crampton

A former resident of Catalonia, and author of  
Call of Catalonia

Just a thought...

## Starmer's weak opposition

WHAT'S THE point in Labour, full stop. It's a neoliberal party committed to the exploitative capitalist system.

Labour's role is to be sufficiently different from Tories so they can call themselves an opposition.

It's not to actually change anything

Alasdair  
on Twitter

## Their crisis, not ours

DO NEGATIVE interest rates mean that working people will have to pay banks to receive their wages? Why should we have to pay for the crisis?

The banks since 2008 have received almost a Trillion pounds in quantitative easing and bailouts.

Tim Evans  
by email

## Unite for our free speech

FORMER LABOUR MP, John Woodcock leading a Tory report into "left wing extremism" is worrying.

This will impact movements like BLM and XR. What about left wing publishers? Will their publications be labelled as inciting violence? The SWP should organise with wider forces now.

John Curtis  
by email

## Budget, don't be fooled

ONLY COMPANIES with profits over £250,000—10 percent of companies—will pay increased corporation tax. And this doesn't come into force until 2023.

What's needed is a larger rise coming into effect immediately on all companies.

Lisa Adams  
via Twitter

## Labour decline in Scotland

I LIVED in Scotland and witnessed support for Labour dwindle to the poor minority it is today.

This was all because it left its roots behind at the behest of Rupert Murdoch and Tony Blair.

John Diment  
on Facebook

## Stand against all the anti-Traveller racism

THE USE of a blacklist of common Irish surnames by Pontins to block Travellers from its holiday parks is a glimpse of the systemic anti Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Racism.

Here in Walsall, leader of the Conservative council, Mike Bird has previously made racist comments about Travellers.

During a phone-in on BBC West Midlands, he accused travellers of thefts in the borough.

When one caller labelled travellers "parasitic" Bird responded, "The gentleman

is absolutely 100 percent right."

Under pressure, the Tory council is now proposing a Travellers' Transit site. GRT representatives have said this is vital, yet Labour councillors have attacked the proposal, opening a space for further racism.

Black Country Stand Up to Racism has initiated a meeting to stand in solidarity and provide a platform for traveller representatives.

Martin Lynch  
Walsall

## Trans liberation is more than gestures

"WHAT'S IN a name," wonders Juliet in Shakespeare's breakout teen romance. Well, the American right has an answer, a brand of anthropomorphic toy potato isn't a "Mr" anymore.

So it's "The end of American freedom," said radio host Glenn Beck, one of many reactionaries who inhabit America's conservative ecosystem.

According to these right wing reactionaries, the potato head formally known as "Mr." is the latest victim of the left's "cancel culture."

Mr and Mrs Potato



Potato Head PICTURE: JOSH HALLETT

head are still available. But as the branding just says, "Potato Head" it's only a matter of time before Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez banishes Fox News viewers to gulags, forced to make pronoun badges.

Not that the left wanted gender neutral spuds.

Gender inequalities among root vegetables rank low on the list of battles over sexism and transphobia.

It's also clear to anyone familiar with how capitalism works, that this rebranding is motivated by profit not "inclusivity." Internet outrage sometimes leads to left-leaning people spending billions on "woke" brands.

To annoy reactionaries and win total liberation, don't buy the potato head. Fight to smash capitalism instead!

Bethan Turner  
East London



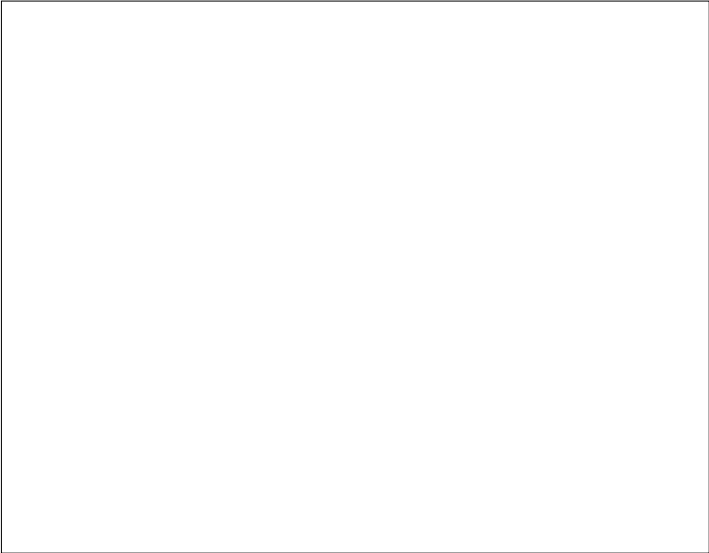
The rich who gained from slavery hope talking up their charitable investments will help them escape people’s anger. But as **Isabel Ringrose** argues, they grabbed obscene amounts of money through the slave trade and in compensation—and they should be forced to pay for it

**B**RITISH CAPITALISM was built on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and key institutions were central to it. Eleven former governors and 16 directors of the Bank of England owned slaves or directly profited from the trade between the 18th and 19th century. The Royal Bank of Scotland, Barclays Bank, Lloyds Banking Group, HSBC and Royal Mail have also been linked to slavery. Britain, the leading slave trading nation, transported 3.1 million Africans across the Atlantic Ocean between 1640 and 1808. The 2.7 million people who survived the inhumane journey faced brutality and cruelty in the Caribbean.

Slaves were forced to produce sugar, cotton, tobacco and coffee. Slavers controlled them by flogging, covering open wounds in salt, cutting off body parts and rape. Life expectancy was 21 years old. Capitalism justified slavery by claiming black people were inferior to white people. This built institutional racism into the system, where it remains today. Huge sections of Britain’s economy were built around the slave trade. There was money in transporting people and goods, and in creating equipment needed. The biggest profiteers were the ruling classes who made eye-watering wealth from plantations and trading. But some of the money generated also fuelled industry, banks and buildings that still exist to create further profit. Other profits were invested in roads, docks, canals and mines.

**Philanthropy** Profiteers gave huge amounts to institutions including the National Gallery, the Royal Academy, the Tate, the Victoria and Albert and the British Museum. We are often told about the investments and philanthropy that slave money funded. So Tory slaver Edward Colston, director of the Royal African Company in 1680, invested today’s equivalent of £25 million in Bristol for schools, almshouses and poorhouses. But the price of this was the transportation of 84,000 African men, women and children across the Atlantic, an estimated 19,000 of whom died on the journey. The heirs of slavers also talk

“**The government paid reparations at slavery’s end—but they were to slave owners, not slaves**”



up their “charitable” work. The Greene King pub chain and brewery, founded by slave owner Benjamin Greene, last year said it would pay reparations “to support the BAME community”. And insurance market Lloyd’s of London said it would donate to charities “promoting opportunity and inclusion for black and minority ethnic groups”. It had underwritten insurance policies on voyages transporting slaves. One of its founders, Simon Fraser, owned 162 slaves on the Castle Bruce estate in Dominica. Firms with blood on their hands hope to divert people’s anger by making relatively minor contributions. The main beneficiaries of slavery remain the slavers and their heirs. The slave trade was abolished in 1807, but slavery wasn’t abolished until 1833. And freed slaves didn’t get compensation—their owners did for their “losses”.

**Descended** Benjamin Greene was handed around £500,000 in today’s money when slavery was abolished, for three plantations and 231 slaves. And Fraser’s heirs were compensated with £400,000 in today’s money. The government paid out some £20 million, equivalent to £17 billion today. Most of it went to a tiny number of slave owners—around 3,000 out of 47,000 got nearly half of the money. The money the government borrowed to hand to slave owners wasn’t repaid until 2015. So people descended from slaves were paying the price for it through taxes. Thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, calls for reparations to be paid by people, places and organisations that gained from slavery are getting louder. Anti-racists must fight to keep the focus on Britain’s bloody past. And those responsible or who benefited must pay.

**‘A Liverpool slave ship’ by William Jackson** This unidentified ship in the terrifying Middle Passage (above) Charborough House, owned by the Drax family in Dorset, was built with slave money from plantations in Barbados (right) The Black Lives Matter movement has made people question monuments to slavers, such as Robert Milligan (below)

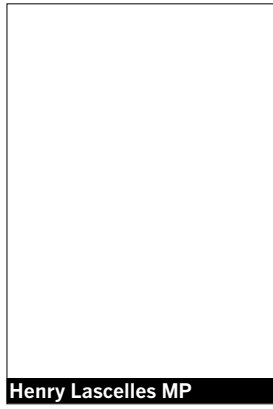
# BLOOD MONEY

## How wealth created by slavery bankrolled capitalist Britain

**‘Wonderful’ country estate’s foundations are wholly rotten**

THE LASCELLES’ Harewood House estate in Yorkshire is advertised as “a wonderful place to feel inspired”. It is rooted in slavery. MP Henry Lascelles, who bought the estate’s land, owned plantations and exported sugar. He was one of the wealthiest men in the early 18th century. Henry helped create the “floating slave factory” where human cargo would be imprisoned on ships before being sold. His son Edwin built Harewood and added 22 plantations and 2,947 slaves to the family’s portfolio. Edwin’s cousin Edward, also an MP inherited this wealth. It’s worth £287 million in today’s money. When slavery was abolished the family was handed £26,307 in six claims for 1,277 slaves in Barbados and Jamaica. They only sold their last plantation in 1970.

Harewood is owned by cousin to the queen David Lascelles, the 8th Earl of Harewood. Commenting on a BBC documentary made about his ancestors he said, “We have to try to be positive. “There’s absolutely nothing we can do about the past. “I hope Harewood is a positive thing. It’s a nice place. We do a lot of work with schools, particularly in deprived urban areas. “What I don’t want to see happen is that Harewood becomes known as ‘that slavery place’.”



Slavers' names are everywhere on Merseyside

**Liverpool—where statutes of slavers lined the streets**

LIVERPOOL’S 18TH to 19th century economy was centred around the slave trade. Of the 3.1 million African people taken across the Atlantic by the British, Liverpool’s ships transported half. Between 1787 and 1807 all of its mayors were slave owners or traders. And with one exception, all MPs during the same period opposed abolition. Investment was pumped into the city, even for causes such as the Liverpool Dispensary for the Sick. Buildings in Liverpool are still decorated with carvings celebrating the slave trade. Street names honour barbaric traders who built the city, such as Parr Street after Thomas Parr. Slavers aren’t only celebrated in Liverpool. The 18th century slave owner William Beckford’s held 13 sugar plantations, 22,000 acres of land and 3,000 slaves. Beckford, an MP and Mayor of London, still has a statue in the Guildhall in the City of London.

**Tory MP whose family did most damage to people of Barbados**

THE DRAX family was one of the first to bring sugar to the Caribbean and commercialise its cultivation through large scale slave labour. James Drax established the first plantation on the island of Barbados and later built Drax Hall Estate in the 1650s. The plantation killed 30,000 slaves over 200 years. Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, chair of Caribbean Community’s Reparations Commission, said the Draxes have “done more harm and violence to the black people of Barbados than any other”. In 1836 John Erle-Drax was compensated £4,293, 12 shillings and 6 pence for 189 slaves. Tory MP for South Dorset Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax now owns the family’s fortune. He’s the wealthiest landowner in the House of Commons, thanks to slavery. And he owns Drax Hall Estate in Barbados—including the original plantation—which still grows sugar. When questioned about his family’s cruel legacy during the 2010 election campaign, Drax complained that critics were “using the old class thing” to undermine him. Last year he said, “No one can be held responsible today for what happened many hundreds of years ago.”

# Liberal versions of slavery reparations don’t cut it

**W**HAT WOULD it take to compensate black people in Britain for the horrors the slave trade inflicted on so many millions of their ancestors? Is there a sum of money that can take account of the brutality of slavery and the endemic racism it created? Or will an apology from the queen or the government suffice? Councillors in Bristol last week passed what they think is the beginning of an answer—a motion demanding an all-party parliamentary commission of inquiry. This should include the question of monetary compensation, but also note the contribution of “African civilisation, culture and people”. Questioning British capitalism’s reliance on slavery and racism is a good thing. But there are real weaknesses in the council’s approach. First, by insisting that parliament take up the issue, councillors seek to pass the initiative from the streets to a privileged layer of politicians. This undermines the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which has mobilised huge protests. There are good reasons why Bristol councillors would welcome such a move. A court in the city is currently trying those accused of trashing the statue of slave trader Edward Colston, gloriously felled by a multiracial crowd.

**Radicalism** Street protests carry the persistent danger of radicalism, and few councillors want much of that. Second, reparations are being posed as a means of creating a “level playing field”. It’s as though vast racial inequalities are an aberration that can be ironed out with a package of reforms. But one of the key messages of BLM is that racism is structural. It is not a sign that the system is “malfunctioning” but rather that it is functioning exactly as it was intended to. Capitalism cannot exist without divisions such as race. It has embedded them deep into all of its key institutions. Together these institutions help create a racist society. It wouldn’t be possible to sustain such an exploitative regime if those at the bottom of society didn’t often see each other as competitors and enemies. Racism performs exactly that function. So the idea of capitalism without racism is a fantasy. And the debate around financial reparations raises other questions. Who gets control of any monies that are eventually released? Backers of the Bristol motion envisage community programmes that deal with things such as food poverty, health inequality and educational disadvantage. All potentially good things. But the people in charge of any such projects will not be poor people, black or white, but their better off “representatives”. Instead of empowering those most affected by racism, this top-down approach entrenches the black middle class.

**Measure** This doesn’t measure the success of black liberation by whether oppressed people are in a better position to make, and fight for, their own demands. Instead, it is measured by how many black and brown faces adorn glossy council leaflets. Most importantly, the demand for an inquiry will seek to divert anger at racism into acceptable channels. So rather than targeting the police for the way racism is so engrained in its ranks, we will be encouraged to “engage” with them. And rather than revealing the bloody history of many of Britain’s top firms, we will be expected to be assuaged by the offer of a funding grant from their directors. Some of the biggest advances in the fight against racism in our lifetimes came last year. BLM protests put today’s racism, and its roots in this country’s sordid past, at the centre of the political agenda. Seen in this light, the fight for reparations could be far more radical. It could encompass demands to cancel the debts of countries in the Global South. It could call for the lifting of all patents on vital vaccines and medicines. It could fight for the abolition of state institutions here that play a key role in oppressing black people—including the police and immigration forces. And it could demand back the wealth from those families and firms who stole from Africa.

**Yuri Prasad**



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

### INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

### REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

### THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

### INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism.

In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to [www.swp.org.uk](http://www.swp.org.uk) or phone 020 7840 5602

# Socialist Workers Party online meetings



## Is the Labour Party right to wave the Union Jack?

**BRISTOL**  
Thu 18 Mar,  
7.30pm  
688-397-3148

**CARDIFF**  
Wed 17 Mar,  
7.30pm  
630-181-4857

**LONDON:  
HACKNEY**  
Thu 18 Mar,  
7.30pm  
798-534-2585

**NEWCASTLE**  
Wed 17 Mar, 7pm  
368-595-2712

**BIRMINGHAM**  
100 years since  
partition—can there  
be a united Ireland?  
Wed 17 Mar, 7pm  
281-634-5938

**BLACK COUNTRY, SHROPSHIRE  
AND STAFFORDSHIRE**  
In the pandemic  
and beyond—crisis  
and resistance  
Wed 17 Mar,  
7.30pm  
352 891 2411

**BRADFORD**  
Anger to revolution—what  
makes people rise up?  
Thu 18 Mar,  
7pm  
885 9187 7552

**BRIGHTON AND HOVE**  
Indian workers and  
farmers—mass revolt  
against Modi  
Thu 18 Mar,  
6.30pm  
841 2142 3683

**BURNLEY AND PENDLE**  
When workers fight  
for the environment  
Wed 17 Mar,  
7.30pm  
446 409 5118

**CAMBRIDGE**  
Macron, racism and  
Islamophobia  
Thu 18 Mar,  
7.30pm  
681-800-4408

**GLASGOW**  
Lessons from the Anti-Nazi  
League—building the anti-  
racist movement today  
Thu 18 Mar, 6.30pm  
851-5254-7239

**HOME COUNTIES**  
Lessons from the Anti Nazi  
League—building the anti-  
racist movement today  
Thu 18 Mar, 6.30pm  
941 564 2245

**HUDDERSFIELD**  
The Egyptian Revolution—  
why it matters ten years on  
Wed 17 Mar, 6.30pm  
290-168-1804

**KENT**  
France, racism and  
Islamophobia  
Thu 18 Mar,  
8.15pm  
434-623-8064

**LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE**  
The Syrian revolution—  
ten years on  
Thu 18 Mar, 7pm  
992-204-9372

**LEEDS**  
The politics of country music  
Thu 18 Mar,  
7pm  
881 4770 0676

**LIVERPOOL**  
Rock Against Racism  
40 years on—using  
culture to fight racism  
Wed 17 Mar,  
7pm  
493-925-5919

**LONDON: HARINGEY**  
Global acts of defiance  
Wed 17 Mar,  
7.30pm  
459-388-1576

**LONDON: ISLINGTON**  
Freedom of speech  
and 'cancel culture'  
Thu 18 Mar, 7pm  
874-012-7970

**LONDON: NEWHAM**  
Palestine, imperialism  
and the left  
Wed 17 Mar,  
7pm  
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Free speech, the Tories  
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Big pharma—will the  
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Why we hate Mondays—  
Marxism and alienation  
Wed 17 Mar,  
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What's happening  
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Wed 17 Mar,  
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The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions.

Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and just before the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. **The password for all meetings is 967537.**

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Women and the  
Paris Commune  
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# The case of Britney Spears, mental distress and the state

The documentary *Framing Britney Spears* has lifted the lid on the ugly world of profit and exploitation behind the celebrity glamour, writes **Sophie Squire**

**IT IS often hard to sympathise with celebrities, with their wealth and luxurious lifestyles. But the documentary *Framing Britney Spears* lifts a lid on a life in the spotlight marred by sexism, exploitation and mental distress.**

This documentary begins with the voices of #FreeBritney campaigners, who are demanding that Spears is released from a conservatorship controlled by her father.

This legal constraint has for more than a decade controlled almost every aspect of Spears' life, from the people she sees to control over her finances.

The charity Disability Rights California says that "by their nature," conservatorships limit individual autonomy and the ability to make choices."

For almost her whole career—which began when she was a child—Spears has been scrutinised, and sometimes vilified, by the media.

Almost every swipe society routinely takes against women has been taken against Spears.

At the beginning of her career she was presented as promiscuous. After she had children she was branded an incapable and irresponsible mother.

The mental distress she underwent was treated as tabloid entertainment. As one of the #FreeBritney campaigners said, the media had "profited off her misery."

And it was Spears' declining mental health that allegedly became the reason for her to be placed under a conservatorship.

But despite being considered unable to make decisions over her life she was deemed capable of performing hundreds of times making tens of million in profit.

## Dogged

The dogged pursuit of profit by those around Spears—at her expense—is clear throughout the film. Shockingly the conservatorship was even described in court as a "business model".

Throughout the documentary there are glimpses of Spears wishing for autonomy that she isn't afforded.

She says, "If I wasn't under this legal stuff I would feel so liberated. I'd feel like myself".

There will be people out there who, like Spears, are seeking freedom from conservatorships.

Mental distress and disability are used as justification to rob people of their autonomy.

While focusing on Spears this documentary uncovers how it is possible for the state to completely strip a person of their rights.

Available to stream on Now TV



ANDRA DAY as Billie Holiday

## Film shows persecution of Billie Holiday

### FILM

**THE UNITED STATES VS BILLIE HOLIDAY**

Available now on Sky Cinema

**THE LEGENDARY** Billie Holiday, one of the greatest jazz

musicians of all time, spent much of her career being adored by fans across the globe.

Beginning in the 1940s in New York City, the federal government targeted Holiday.

Their ultimate aim was to stop her from singing the anti-lynching

ballad *Strange Fruit*. This film—written by Suzan-Lori Parks—tells that story

Singer-songwriter Andra Day plays Holiday in this tale of a fierce trailblazer whose defiance through music fed into the civil rights movement.

### STREAMING

**THE SISTERS BROTHERS**

Now on Netflix

JACQUES Audiard's 2019 film takes on one of US cinema's staples—the Western—and puts his own spin on it.

Two brothers, Eli and Charlie Sisters, are on the trail of chemist Hermann Kermit Warm. They are to torture and kill Warm, but don't know why.

Warm wants to set up "a society where the relationships among men aren't governed by profit" with the proceeds from a discovery he has made.

It's a discovery that has made him a wanted man.

This is a superior Western. Each character is twisted in one way or another by the society they live in.

It's about how the dehumanising logic of capitalism brutalises everything it touches.

But it's also about the possibility of redemption.

### PAMPHLET

**PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT—THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL CARE IN SCOTLAND**

By the Social Work Action Network and the Jimmy Reid Foundation, £4

**THE HORRIFIC—AND** often avoidable—impact the coronavirus pandemic on older people and disabled people in Scotland has shown the inadequacies of the social care system.

At the heart of these is the domination by market forces and by private



providers whose primary concern is with profit, not care.

This pamphlet, calls for a publicly owned, controlled and funded national care service, where care workers and care users are in the driving seat.

It features contributions by disabled activists, public sector trade unionists, frontline workers and campaigners.

The pamphlet can help shape the debate in the coming months over the kind of National Care Service we want to see.

Go to [calton-books.co.uk](http://calton-books.co.uk)



**O**N 11 March in 2011 a magnitude 9.0 earthquake took place about 70 kilometres east of Japan.

It caused a massive tsunami wave that resulted in enormous destruction. Almost 16,000 people died, 120,000 buildings were destroyed and a further million damaged.

But this destruction was almost immediately overshadowed in the news due to an unfolding disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Fukushima was one of the world's largest nuclear power plants with six reactors.

It was built in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the US energy company General Electric and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco).

When the earthquake hit, the reactors at Fukushima Daiichi shut down automatically and switched to emergency onsite power.

This power was needed to keep essential equipment running—in particular the pumps that circulated water to cool the reactors.

But when, a short while later, the tsunami hit the wave breached inadequate seawalls, destroying infrastructure and flooding the complex.

Onsite power generation failed which meant there was no energy to pump water to cool the reactors.

Workers fought to stop the disaster from escalating but were slowed down by the death and devastation.

They had to hunt through the wreckage for car and bus batteries to connect crucial safety instrumentation to find out what was happening in the reactor cores.

Years of underfunding and mismanagement compounded the disaster.

In 2002 Tepco admitted that it had been falsifying safety records for years included covering up evidence of cracks in reactors at all its plants.

#### Falsified

Five years later Tepco admitted that it had falsified records of 200 incidents.

The close relationship between Tepco and the Japanese government was also exposed and in the aftermath of the disaster.

These links helped protect the nuclear industry while the government played down the risks.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) in 2012, 22 members of the Japanese Nuclear Safety Commission had received over £947,000 from the nuclear industry.

These links aren't unique to Japan. The nuclear industry arose out of the need to build nuclear weapons. Plants



# FUKUSHIMA—A NUCLEAR WARNING

It's ten years since two disasters compromised one of the largest nuclear plants in the world. It showed that nuclear power can never be safe, says Martin Empson

continue to provide material for the arms industry.

The origins of nuclear power in Japan can be found in Cold War politics.

The nuclear industry promised jobs and investment to remote regions of Japan.

From the earliest days of the nuclear industry in Japan there were close links between national and local government, private industry and international politics.

This cosy relationship meant that Tepco could get away with lax safety measures, while the government pushed nuclear as a safe and economically viable

block Tepco from building a new plant arguing the "government had failed to perform adequate inspections of the geology of the plant site and had overlooked an active fault line".

In 2005 a court ruled "there was no fault line". But two years later a 6.8 magnitude quake hit the plant which was designed only to cope with quakes of less than 6.5 resulting in a fire.

**AFTER the Fukushima disaster the seismologist Katsuhiko Ishibashi said that if, "Japan had faced up to the dangers earlier we could have prevented Fukushima."**

The Japanese nuclear industry was guilty of two mistakes.

Firstly they downplayed the potential for seismic events to endanger their reactors. Secondly, they failed to plan for situations where multiple events took place simultaneously.

Their planning for earthquakes calculated it was unlikely that earthquakes would happen together with other disasters.

A tsunami in 2004 forced a re-evaluation of the risks from these events. But even after that, Tepco decided that the types of fault lines near Fukushima would not cause a tsunami. It did not agree to make changes that might have reduced the Fukushima disaster.

When the disaster struck Fukushima the damage caused multiple explosions, repeated radiation leaks and a crisis that threatened to escalate rapidly.

In the end it was the people who stayed at their posts to stop disaster who finally brought the situation under control.

#### Lethal

They worked in dangerous conditions, close to lethal levels of radiation and often with inadequate PPE.

Unsure whether they would survive the workers wrote their names on a whiteboard in the main control room to make sure their families knew what had happened to them.

There is no doubt that their bravery in the hours days and weeks after the earthquake prevented a far worse disaster.

Over 160,000 people were forced to flee their homes in the wake of Fukushima.

Today apologists for nuclear power suggest that many of these people had no need to flee.

But outside of Japan, leading nuclear authorities thought that the scale of the disaster warranted a bigger evacuation than the Japanese government was willing to organise.

In the aftermath there was a global revaluation of nuclear power. Huge protests in Japan demanded the closure of the industry.

In the US the industry argued that Fukushima was unique and couldn't happen there. But this

energy system.

But the truth was very different because Japan is particularly susceptible to earthquakes.

And as the industry expanded there were growing concerns about seismic activity.

According to a history of the Fukushima disaster written by members of the UCS, "time and again, utilities and regulators downplayed or ignored the threat posed by earthquakes".

The authors explain that when residents tried to challenge the industry on safety they were often brushed off.

For example, in 1979 residents in Kashiwazaki tried to

“

**Over 160,000 people were forced to flee their homes by the disaster**

Workers were at risk



## Dispatches from the front line of the revolution

Larissa Reisner fought to defend the Russian Revolution. Now a new translation of her reports brings that fight to life, writes **Sophie Squire**

"MUCH BETTER to die in open combat, among comrades, with weapons in their hands. That's how I want to die. That's how hundreds and thousands die for this republic every day."

This is from the writings of Bolshevik revolutionary, journalist and soldier Larissa Reisner, who committed her life to the survival of the Russian Revolution.

While working as a journalist and a teacher in Petrograd the event that would change her life—the 1917 Russian Revolution—broke out.

Reisner offered up her services to the central committee of the revolutionary socialist Bolshevik party.

From there she took on a number of roles including the first woman to be political commissar in the revolutionary Red Army.

Reisner's Dispatches from the Front Line is an account of the years 1918 and 1919. Russia was plunged into civil war and invaded by 14 foreign armies.

Reisner describes some of the dangerous undercover missions she undertook often only just avoiding capture.

#### Undercover

But her account is also filled with the horror of the civil war—and the brutality Russia's capitalist ruling class used to try and crush the revolution.

"Chistopol, Elabuga, Chelny and Sarapul—all these small towns are dripping blood," she wrote.

"In one place, the wives and children of the Red Army soldiers were flung into the Kama River and even babies-in-arms were not spared."

But while capturing immense suffering Reisner also focused on the determination and heroism

a communist engineer, Brzezinski, invented a brilliant thing—he worked out how to fix mines to the keels of ordinary sailing boats and in that way was able to arm a whole flotilla of sailboats."

And although not a dominant theme in the accounts, she highlighted the determination and bravery of women.

One passage describes a young woman who, despite being badly injured, walked from Ukraine to join the Red Army.

Reisner describes her journey as an "absolute purgatory of long roads, hellish train travel and a burning fear of forever being separated from all the names and faces which connected her to revolution".

#### Respect

The warmth and respect Reisner had for her comrades shine through.

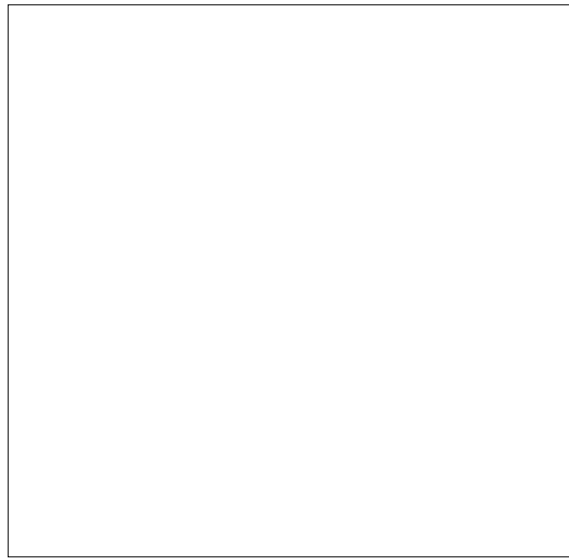
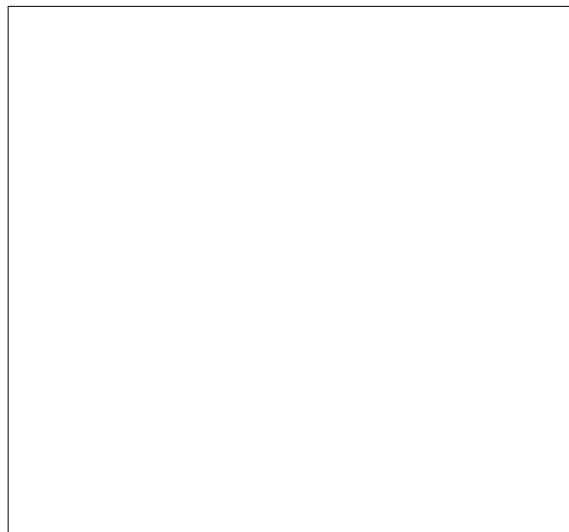
It is easy to understand why Reisner's account was so popular with so many on its publication in 1920. It's exciting, heartfelt and even sometimes funny—all while remaining a vital historical account.

Reisner would never see Joseph Stalin's counter-revolution, as she died from Typhus in 1926. But her words capture the true spirit of the revolution that Stalin tried to destroy.

Dispatches From the Front Line is filled with the message that it is working people that make revolutions—and who strive to keep them alive.

“

**Creativity belongs to us—it's not just a bourgeois trait”**



**Some of the damage to the reactor (top) The tsunami caused widespread destruction (above)**

The taxpayer covers this—not the nuclear companies that have profited from selling the electricity.

New plants take years to build and rightly require detailed safety analysis which explains their high cost.

A new plant at Sizewell C in Suffolk is expected to cost £18 billion and £22 billion for another at Hinkley Point C in Somerset.

The world urgently needs to transform its approach to energy use.

But this cannot mean pouring billions into a nuclear industry that promises much but fails to deliver and puts countless lives at risk.

Instead, socialists must fight for strategies that reduce energy use, increase efficiency, reduce waste and are based on renewable energy.

Energy infrastructure must be taken out of the hands of corporations and put into public ownership.

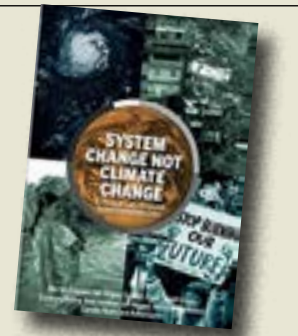
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## Egypt 2011—could things have been different?

by SAMORD

THE STRENGTH of the Egyptian Revolution pushed dictator Hosni Mubarak from his presidential position in just 18 days.

Mass demonstrations of hundreds of thousands and workers' strikes forced him out.

But despite the revolution's successes, it didn't ultimately put power in the hands of the working class. This wasn't inevitable.

Workers have shown their potential to take power and run society differently after time during revolutionary upheavals.

During a revolution in Germany in November 1918, workers set up workers' councils, called Arbeiterrat.

### Democratic

They were alternative strongholds of power, and more democratic than the capitalist parliament.

They mirrored the workers' councils called Soviets that were built during the 1917 Russian Revolution.

These councils are made



EGYPTIAN WORKERS marching on May Day in 2013

PICTURE: GIGI IBRAHIM

up of elected people from different workplaces and areas.

They challenge the existing state for power, and are tasked with driving the workers' movement to victory.

The Soviets in Russia, led by the Bolshevik party, were

able to seize state power and started to build a socialist society.

But in Germany, the councils didn't take power. Instead they chose to return it to the social democratic government.

Workers councils are born from struggle and shaped

by the circumstances of the time.

In Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists group called for the setting up of councils during the revolution in February 2011. These could have driven the revolution forward.

But the revolution took

place at a time when the working class had suffered decades of repression.

Many workers were forming unions for the first time, and were new to organising.

And revolutionaries, relatively small in number, didn't have the reach that a bigger and more established group could have had.

This doesn't mean Egypt's workers weren't able to fight. Egypt has a large, young working class that had taken militant action before the 2011 revolt.

Over 220 major strikes took place in Egypt in 2006, including a series of militant walkouts by 27,000 textile workers in Mahalla.

And tens of thousands of workers struck during the revolution, in solidarity with people facing repression in Tahrir Square.

In the months that followed, some groups of workers set up committees in workplaces that challenged bosses for control. It was a tiny example of what was possible.

But these initiatives didn't develop into workers' councils that could have posed

a bigger challenge to the system.

Had they done so, they could have won soldiers over to opposing the regime and strengthened the revolution.

### Imperialism

A bigger challenge to the state in Egypt could also have spurred revolts across the region—and pushed back Western imperialism.

The revolution clearly showed a thirst among ordinary people for a different way of living.

Cairo's Tahrir Square became a space to raise debates and arguments during the revolt. These offered a glimpse of what real democracy could look like.

Today Egypt remains plagued by dictatorship, unemployment and low wages. But the Egyptian Revolution could have ended differently.

Revolutionaries and workers must learn the lessons from 2011 to be in a better position for future struggles.

This is part of a series of articles on Egypt in revolution. Read our coverage at [bit.ly/EgyptSW2021](http://bit.ly/EgyptSW2021)

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# Sunak's budget takes from the poor to give to the rich

The Spring Budget was announced by Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak last week. Nick Clark examines the gifts promised for bosses and the pain for workers

**CHANCELLOR** Rishi Sunak's budget is Tory through and through. He promised a glut of tax cuts and giveaways for bosses and the rich—and threatened austerity for ordinary people in the future.

No money to repair the damage to workers' lives during the pandemic so fatally mishandled by the Tories. No cash for the NHS, education and a green recovery.

Instead in his speech last week, the Tory chancellor boasted of giving bosses "the biggest business tax cut in modern British history".

He promised businesses a "super deduction" in their tax bill in return for investing in machinery—essentially a bribe to get bosses spending money.

## Relief

Under the plan, businesses will be able to claim tax relief on profits of up to 130 percent of the cost of investment for the next two years. That will be worth £25 billion to bosses.

That offsets massively the meagre—and much talked about—rise in corporation tax.

Sunak said corporation tax would rise to 25 percent. But only businesses with profits of more than £250,000—just 10 percent of companies—will be taxed the full amount.

And the rise isn't set to come into place until 2023.

Tony Danker of the bosses' CBI organisation said there would be a "sharp intake of breath" from bosses at the idea of paying any more tax. But he was soothed by the prospect of more giveaways. "The boldness of the chancellor is to be admired," he added.

## Pay cap 'is a disgrace'

**UNION LEADERS** slammed the budget.

General secretary of the Unison union Christina McAnea said, "The chancellor had much to say on how to revive the economy but strangely silent on public services.

"There was no extra money for a social care system on its knees. Staff are highly skilled but lowly paid and barely earn the legal minimum.

"No mention of cash to raise the morale of exhausted NHS workers and grant the pay rise they've more than earned."

Mark Serwotka of the civil service workers' PCS union said

Sunak's "refusal to lift the pay cap on civil servants and other public sector workers, who have kept the country going during the pandemic, is a disgrace".

There should be no more illusions that union leaders can work in "partnership" with the government and bosses, as many of them claimed at the start of the pandemic.

In reality it's a question of whether bosses or workers pay—and Sunak is fighting on the side of the bosses.

It's time for union leaders to begin a fightback for our side.

## THE CHANCELLOR unveils his pro-business budget

Hospitality and leisure businesses will also get a tax cut totalling £6 billion.

Sunak has let them off paying business rates for three months—followed by a two thirds discount for the nine months after that.

And bosses will also be able to apply for government grants out of a pot of £5 billion.

That means—according to Sunak—that the total amount of direct cash to businesses has reached £25 billion.

Sunak has also raised taxes for the lowest paid workers by stealth.

He is freezing the income tax threshold at £12,750 until 2026.

The threshold means anyone earning less than this doesn't have to pay tax.

But if wages rise above it along with inflation, fewer and fewer low paid workers will be exempt.

On top of that, many local authorities plan to raise council tax by up to 4.9 percent, blaming low funding from the government.

Disgracefully Labour leader Keir Starmer backed bosses saying, "It's right that corporation tax isn't rising

this year or next."

But Labour was much more slippery on the question of the income tax freeze.

Offering couched in, concerned-sounding mumbling about low paid workers, Labour's shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds hinted they could back it. "In principle we are not against the freeze," she said.

## On other pages...

Slavery, reparations and the role of Britain's rulers >>Pages 10&11

## Limited benefit support

**EVEN** supposed "support" for ordinary people is an insult—and designed to subsidise the bosses. The furlough scheme is set to be extended to the end of September. And the £20 a week uplift to the Universal Credit benefit scheme has been extended by six months.

Both are used by bosses to get out of paying workers a living wage—meaning many low paid and unemployed workers rely on them.

The extensions mean they won't immediately lose out—but six million families still face losing money by the end of the year.

The £20 should have

been added permanently. Meanwhile, people on other benefits are denied the £20 uplift.

And households receiving working tax credits will just be given a lump sum of £500. Trade unions' demands for more statutory sick pay—vital to make sure sick workers stay home in the pandemic—was ignored.

## Freeports avoid taxes

**SUNAK** announced eight new "freeports"—parts of the country where businesses are given extra tax cuts and can dodge planning rules.

They will be in Felixstowe, Liverpool, Hull, Southampton, London Gateway, Plymouth, Teesside and East Midlands airport.

They were billed as a measure to "level up" areas in need of industry and jobs. But freeports have rightly been dubbed "sleazeports" by some—a haven for tax dodging.

Not only that, bosses don't have to follow the same health and safety rules. They are pits of low paid, unsafe work.

## No changes for the climate

**SOME** measures to help bosses were disguised as efforts to tackle climate change. These included issuing "green bonds" designed to raise money to spend on projects such as port infrastructure that will be used by private energy companies.

Sunak also told the Bank of England it has to consider environmental targets when setting monetary policy and buying bonds.

Yet Sunak cut £1 billion from a pot of grants to make homes more energy efficient. And he froze fuel duty for the tenth year running.

## Cuts for councils

**HIDDEN** in the small print, Sunak slashed an extra £4 billion a year from day-to-day spending on public services from next year. This comes on top of cuts he made at the spending review last November, when he slashed £10 billion per year from departmental budgets from this year onwards.



# BT engineers walkout in contract row and plan more strikes

Workers for communications company Openreach are hitting back at bosses attempts to introduce worse contracts reports Nick Clark

**OPENREACH engineers stepped up their picket lines last week, during the second round of strikes against attacks on pay and conditions.**

Around 170 engineers walked out between Wednesday and Friday.

The CWU union members had already struck for two days—but for many last Wednesday was their first picket of the strike.

“It’s a surreal situation being on strike at home,” one striker in Swansea in West Wales told Socialist Worker.

“But to see our colleagues all over the country out on strike gave us a morale boost.

“I feel that coming out on the picket line was the right thing to do.”

He added, “Everybody’s got goodwill, they’re smiling. A lot of people are stopping and talking to us and we’ve had a lot of support. The weather isn’t great but we’ll be here all day.”

Another CWU member said, “What started with one picket last Wednesday has inspired everyone else.

“They’re out all over the country—and more are coming out tomorrow.

“Last week was a big boost. A lot

of them were out on strike but sat at home.

“But once they saw the picket line in Newport and the behaviour of managers it’s emboldened them all.”

The strikers—a group of workers known as Repayment Project Engineers (RPE)—are fighting attempts to bring in new contracts that will change the nature of the job.

Bosses want to shift them onto a managerial grade. But the new grade will mean worse pay and conditions for new starters.

That’s why strikers stress they’re not just fighting for themselves, but to protect workers who follow them.

## Future

One striker told Socialist Worker, “For myself the change wouldn’t make a whole lot of difference because I don’t have much time left in the company.

“But people coming on in the future would be on lower pay, and that’s not on.”

Another said, “The move doesn’t affect us at the moment. But they haven’t confirmed what’s going to happen late on when there’s more people on the new management contract.

“Where will that put us in five years’ time?”

The engineers plan five more strike days between Thursday 18 March and Wednesday 24 March.

Their strike comes as workers across BT face similar attacks on their jobs in a separate dispute.

One union official told Socialist Worker that after the RPE strike, “We’re getting more and more people in other parts of BT asking us when are they going to go out.

“The rest of the company are upset with the way they’re being treated.”



RPE WORKERS take to the picket lines

PICTURE: CWU ON TWITTER

## Tories force benefit claimants to go without basic essentials

TESTIMONIES gathered together by the Disabled People Against Cuts (Dpac) group have revealed the cold, hungry reality of trying to scrape by on benefits during the pandemic.

Universal Credit (UC) claimants said a £20 weekly uplift has made a difference.

“I can eat more than one meal a day, and in winter use the heating every day,” said one. For another, the uplift “meant we ate for four weeks rather than three”.

Another said the it “has been the difference between eating and starving.”

But people receiving “legacy”

benefits that predate UC have had no uplift at all.

Some two thirds have gone without essentials since the pandemic began, the Disability Benefits Consortium found.

Disabled people and others with health conditions are more likely to die from Covid-19.

This has forced many to shield themselves at home, which brings extra costs such as delivery charges and higher energy bills.

“This winter has been a nightmare,” explained one claimant. “I am currently without gas so have no central heating or hot water.”

The lack of support left one claimant feeling “totally abandoned”. “I have 9p left after essential bills and minimal food,” they said. “How is that not discriminatory?”

Even with the uplift, it’s still a struggle to survive.

“I’ve only managed one meal a day because other costs have gone up so much,” said one UC claimant.

Another said it was “difficult” to manage as shielding meant they could no longer go to shops and buy “the items that are going out of date and have been reduced”.

## University workers must return to pickets

A RETURN to the dispute over pensions in the older universities is now looking increasingly likely.

Employers and the pension fund managers of the University Superannuation Scheme (USS) are once more attacking the pension scheme.

Unsurprisingly,

they have chosen the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic to launch their onslaught.

This time the cuts to members’ pensions are even worse.

Back in 2018 it was suggested that members would stand to lose over £200,000 of their pension over their retirement.

This time some estimates suggest that members wouldn’t even get the money they put into it back.

The UCU union must now galvanise the membership to launch a fight over pensions and in doing so build a wider campaign for pensions across all industries.

The UCU Solidarity

Movement is organising a conference on Sunday 14 March to start the debate and development of a strategy that can defeat these cuts. **Carlo Morelli, UCU Scotland president (personal capacity)**

Longer online at [socialistworker.co.uk](https://socialistworker.co.uk) For conference details go to [bit.ly/USSFightBack](https://bit.ly/USSFightBack)

An Openreach support van



## NUCLEAR BASES

# Strikes set for naval bases on the Clyde

**WORKERS WERE** set to strike at the Coulport and Faslane naval bases on the Clyde from Friday this week.

Around 1,000 Unite union members voted 95 percent in support of strikes on a 65 percent turnout across the three different entities at the base.

These are Babcock Industrial, Babcock Non-Industrial and ISS Facility Services.

Stephen Deans, Unite regional coordinating officer, said, "The overwhelming support for industrial action from Unite's membership at the Clyde naval bases should be seen as a strong signal of the frustration and genuine anger felt by the workforce."



A TRIDENT nuclear submarine being worked on at Faslane

involvement or consultation from the trade union.

The base on the Clyde is the navy's headquarters in Scotland. It is the home of Britain's nuclear weapons—submarines armed with Trident missiles. Socialists should oppose the production and maintenance of such weapons.

The vast expenditure on the machinery of mass death could pay for useful work for all those employed many times over. The union is wrong to argue the workers'

case based on bosses allegedly endangering "the country's military power and nuclear response capabilities".

But socialists should still be against these attacks on the workers and in favour of developing union strength to fight back.

Anti-nuclear arguments are not helped by a beaten workforce.

In a separate dispute, Unite has raised "major" safety concerns following plans by outsourcer Capita to reduce the number of firefighters

based at the naval bases. The union has been notified that Capita is set to reduce the specialist fire safety crew by eight positions.

This represents a cut of 15 percent.

Capita won the contract in 2020 for fire response services from the Ministry of Defence. Unite says the company did not consult over the new arrangements.

Capita is set to seek local authority support from nearby fire stations to cover for job cuts.

## NHS

### New action at Heartlands

PORTERS AT Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham have returned to picket lines in a long running dispute over working conditions.

The Unison union said the vital workers would be on strike on Monday and Tuesday of this week.

They are also set to launch a two-day strike starting on Wednesday 24 March.

Trust bosses have insisted that porters sign new contracts that ripped up their previous shift working patterns—or face the sack.

They expected that the workers' union would then quickly end the dispute.

But workers' resistance has pushed union leaders to offer support.

Unison general secretary Christina McAnea gave her wholehearted backing to the strikers and pledged the support of the whole union. Unison has also

used its influence in the Labour Party to bring many local MPs on board too.

This will add to the pressure on trust leaders—especially its chair, former Labour home secretary Jacqui Smith.

The dispute at Heartlands is among many where managers are attempting to use the pandemic as an excuse to wage war on terms and conditions.

To stop the spread of "fire and rehire" practices, it is vital that striking porters keep up the pressure.

●Donations to Unison University Hospitals Birmingham Branch 22536, Unity Trust Bank, account number: 20403849, sort code: 60-83-01 Messages of support to **William Morris@uhb.nhs.uk** and **Lee.Williams2@uhb.nhs.uk** For updates go to Unison Heartlands Porters Dispute

## UNIVERSITIES

WORKERS AT the University of East London were set to strike on Wednesday of this week.

UCU union members are fighting bosses' plans to impose heavy redundancies.

The action follows a successful two-day walkout last month. Strikers say that cuts have already slashed admin teams and student support.

●Tweet support to @saveUEL

■UCU UNION members at the University of Central Lancashire have voted overwhelmingly for strikes to save jobs.

Some 79 percent of those

voting backed strikes and 88 percent also supported action short of a strike.

Bosses want to sack six workers in the Faculty of Culture and Creative Industries, and plans to cut 67 jobs in total across the university.

Around 200 workers there have already taken voluntary redundancy in the past 18 months.

The UCU has pointed out that the university has cash reserves of £100 million, and has allocated £44 million for new buildings this year. General secretary Jo Grady said the planned cuts are "spiteful and unnecessary".

## Overtime

The strikes will be held in conjunction with a continuous ban on special call outs and a ban on all overtime.

The dispute is over pay and bargaining rights.

The "industrial" workforce has strongly rejected a pay offer of 1.1 percent for 2020.

For the non-industrial workforce, a pay settlement was imposed on Unite's members without any

## CONSTRUCTION



Targeting the NG Bailey bosses in London last week

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

## Protests could spread over deskilling

THE CAMPAIGN against deskilling in construction saw protests continue last week.

Several NG Bailey offices were targeted including in Cardiff and Manchester, London, and the site in central London occupied. There was also a protest

against Balfour Beatty Bailey at Grangemouth refinery in Scotland.

The training of new grades at the Hinkley Point nuclear site has apparently been put on hold. But Balfour Beatty Bailey has yet to withdraw the plans to introduce new deskilled

grades to the industry.

An electrician outside the Manchester Bailey's office said, "We are issuing Baileys and Balfour Beatty a final warning. Stop this deskilling agenda of the electrical industry. All your sites are mapped out for direct action."

## SHREWSBURY COLLEGES

### Defend rep John Boken

WORKERS AT Shrewsbury Colleges Group began a three-day strike on Tuesday, in defence of their victimised NEU union rep John Boken. The walkout follows a 24-hour strike last month.

Bosses targeted John after he raised complaints about racism in the college.

Strikers say that the attack on John is part of a wider attempt by employers to weaken the union and workers' rights.

Several other NEU reps across the country also face victimisation.

These include Kirstie Paton in south London and Louise Lewis in west Yorkshire.

A victory for John would boost the fights to defend other reps.

It would also make bosses more wary of attacking trade unionists.

●Send messages of support to **jean.evanson@neu.org.uk**

## ROUND-UP

### DVLA safety vote expected

THE RESULT of a strike ballot by thousands of workers at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) was set to be announced on Thursday of this week.

The PCS union has asked its members to vote yes in a ballot over safety.

Thousands of workers were made to work in unsafe conditions at a major DVLA office in Swansea.

DVLA bosses insisted working conditions at the site were safe, despite more than 500 of its workers catching coronavirus.

■WORKERS AT two law court buildings have voted to strike over coronavirus safety concerns.

Members of the PCS union at Liverpool's Law Courts and Snaresbrook Crown Court in London backed industrial action.

The union has called for courts to be closed and reopened with regular testing of staff and increased safety measures.

■FOOD DELIVERY service Deliveroo is reportedly handing up to £16 million to workers to say thank you for their service during the pandemic.

But unions say that this will not make up for the bad pay and terrible conditions that Deliveroo workers face.

The fund will go to workers that have worked for the company for at least a year and have completed 2,000 orders. The money will go to driver and riders in all the countries that the company operates in.

But a one-off payment that the company has dubbed an "apology fund" is really only a way to distract from the way workers are treated by Deliveroo.

Deliveroo and UberEats drivers in the IWGB union struck in Sheffield last year to demand a living wage and end unfair sackings.

More actions like this are what is really needed to win better pay and terms and conditions for workers.



# BUS STRIKERS STAYING STRONG

**BUS STRIKES** in Manchester continue to push back against bosses' attacks. But management's strike-breaking tactics are risking people's health and lives.

Over 400 workers in Manchester, members of the Unite union, began an all-out strike on Sunday 28 February.

It's in response to plans from bus operating company Go North West to fire and rehire the drivers on worse contracts.

Strikers and their supporters have joined picket lines daily to express their frustration at how these key workers are being treated.

Rob Ward, a bus driver for 14 years, told Socialist Worker that the fire and rehire decision was "a surprise".

"We were told in no uncertain terms to sign this contract or we would be out the door," he said. "It was a real shock to a lot of people."

"Go North West told the media that the contracts were voluntary, but we had no choice. We would have been fired if we didn't sign."

"It shouldn't have come



BUS DRIVERS at health protest in Manchester

PICTURE: LAILA HASSAN

to this. They could have improved standards and conditions, but they haven't."

Another driver told Socialist Worker he was proud to be in a unionised

workplace. "Diamond bus drivers locally were forced to sign new contracts," he said.

"They work 13 hours a day but are paid for nine." "Because they aren't unionised they

didn't have the support to fight back."

We are heading the same way if management get what they want."

The new contract would

also mean workers could miss out on even more pay.

A new clause could be added that means that if management calls a worker in early and then decides to not

make them work at that time they will lose out on that pay.

In an effort to beat the strike, Go North West has temporarily outsourced some services.

Unite's concern that this would increase overcrowding on buses became a reality on Wednesday morning.

One photograph shows 44 people crammed into a single-decker bus which should have been limited to just 18 passengers to reduce the coronavirus threat.

Unite regional secretary Ritchie James said, "Pictures of overcrowded buses are shocking."

There is no social distancing and there is a huge risk of Covid being transmitted.

"The safest alternative would be for Go North West to cancel its fire and rehire policy."

All trade unionists must support this fight not only to push back against the practice of fire and rehire but also to defend key workers who have been some of the hardest by the coronavirus.

Messages of solidarity to Unite\_NorthWest on Twitter and sign the petition [bit.ly/busfirehire](https://bit.ly/busfirehire)

## 'We won't stop striking until they stop attacks,' says London bus driver

OVER 20,000 London bus drivers have been advised to refuse to drive overcrowded buses because of coronavirus safety fears.

The Unite union has told its members that when the bus reaches capacity, the driver should remain in their cab and contact their controller. The bus should remain stationary until the matter is resolved.

Under the regulations, a maximum of 30 passengers can ride on a double-decker bus and the maximum capacity for a single-decker is 11 or 14 depending on its size.

With schools due back on Monday, drivers are highly concerned

that overcrowding will dramatically increase, risking their health and those of all the passengers on the bus.

The move comes as over 2,200 drivers at three subsidiaries of outsourced bus operating company RATP struck last week.

Walkouts on Friday followed strikes held across west and south London.

Workers at London United, one of the RATP subsidiaries, are fighting against a pay cut of up to £2,500.

Drivers would be expected to work longer hours for lower pay.

Abdul, Shepherd's Bush branch rep and driver,



Striking bus workers in Shepherd's Bush, west London

told Socialist Worker, "Management came back to us and said, 'We'll pay you £1,500 less.' We said, 'No thanks' and were back out on strike."

"We're not going to stop striking until they stop attacking us."

"They should stop giving the bosses bonuses and instead give us a pay rise."

Abdul backed the call to take action for safety. "Transport for London isn't enforcing the rules, it's now up to us," he said.

"If we reach the limits we will stop for ours and the public's safety."

"The government only sees us as key workers when they need us—it's

just the same as nurses."

Drivers at RATP subsidiary Quality Line in Epsom, Surrey, were also out on strike on Friday.

They're battling for a larger pay increase than the tiny 0.5 percent—seven pence an hour—they've been offered.

London Sovereign drivers in north west London will continue their strikes on 10 March and 17 March, coinciding with the return to schools.

Retreats and concessions haven't worked during this dispute. Drivers must continue striking to win decent pay and safe working conditions.